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Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15
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FM AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6227
INFO AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUJUMBURA 0602

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, EMIN, RO, BY
SUBJ: FURTHER CORDIALITY IN ROMANIAN-BURUNDIAN RELATIONS

1. A ROMANIAN DELEGATION HEADED BY FIRST DEPUTY MINES MINISTER GHEORGHE DOBRA SPENT ABOUT TWO WEEKS IN BURUNDI DURING THE FIRST HALF OF MAY TO EXPAND THE GROWING BILATERAL LINKS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. VERY LITTLE SPECIFIC HAS BEEN PUBLISHED, BUT THERE WERE EFFUSIVE OUTPOURINGS OF GOOD WILL FROM BOTH SIDES, AND ROMANIA IS INCLUDING BUJUMBURA ON THE AFRICAN TOUR OF A DANCE AND CHORAL GROUP FOR A WEEK EARLY IN JUNE.

2. THE MAIN FOCUS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN THE BURUNDIAN DESIRE TO GET THE ROMANIANS COMMITTED TO MORE AID AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, FOR WHICH, IN TURN, THE ROMANIANS WOULD APPARENTLY LIKE SOME PREFERENTIAL ACCESS FOR THEIR EXPORTS. ROMANIA HAS ALREADY SOLD BURUNDI 40 INTERCITY BUSES ON A COMMERCIAL CREDIT OF ABOUT ONE MILLION DOLLARS, AND ITS RECENT ASSIGNMENT OF A COMMERCIAL OFFICER TO ITS EMBASSY IMPLIES THAT IT BELIEVES PROSPECTS FOR GROWING TRADE ARE ATTRACTIVE.

3. ROMANIA HAS HAD DISCUSSIONS FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS ON POSSIBLE ROMANIAN ASSISTANCE IN BURUNDIAN AGRICULTURAL AND MINING
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PROJECTS. TWO YEARS AGO, THIS LED TO THE DETAILING TO THE UNDP MINERALS SURVEY TEAM HERE OF A ROMANIAN GROUP OF 4 OR 5 GEOLOGISTS AND MINING EXPERTS, WHO HAVE PROVIDED GOOD SERVICE TO THIS UN PROJECT. IN ADDITION, EARLY IN 1976, BURUNDI AND ROMANIA SET UP A JOINT COMPANY, SOMIBUROM, TO OPERATE IN THE MINING FIELD IN BURUNDI.

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4. ACCORDING TO A DOCUMENT WHICH WE HAVE FLEETINGLY SEEN, MUCH OF THE PRESENT ROUND OF TALKS WENT INTO FLESHING OUT THE STRUCTURE OF SOMIBUROM. BURUNDI HAS A 51 PERCENT SHARE, BUT, IN PRACTICE, THE TWO SIDES SEEM TO HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS TO INVOLVE THE COMPANY IN ALL MATTERS CONCERNING MINING, INCLUDING NICKEL MINING, IN BURUNDI. THE COMPANY HAS THE RIGHT TO REVIEW ALL PROPOSALS BY THIRD PARTIES ABOUT MINERAL DEVELOPMENT IN BURUNDI AND CAN INITIATE PROJECTS OF ITS OWN. IN EFFECT, THE BURUNDIAN SIDE PROMISES SOMIBUROM ACCESS TO MINING SITES AND GOOD WORKING CONDITIONS IN BURUNDI, WHILE THE ROMANIANS PROMISE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND A MODICUM OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT. THERE IS A SPECIFIC CLAUSE ABOUT FACILITATING PURCHASE OF ROMANIAN HEAVY EQUIPMENT FOR SOMIBUROM PROJECTS. OFFICES WILL BE IN BURUNDI.

5. IN ADDITION, ROMANIA HAS APPARENTLY COMMITTED ITSELF TO FORMING ANOTHER MIXED COMPANY FOR AGRICULTURAL AND INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS IN BURUNDI. CONTRIBUTIONS OF CAPITAL ON THE ORDER OF A FEW MILLION DOLLARS HAVE BEEN RUMORED. THE ROMANIANS HAVE AGREED TO TRY TO REHABILITATE A FERTILE PLAIN AREA IN EXTREME SOUTHWESTERN BURUNDI ALONG LAKE TANGANYIKA THAT WAS DEVASTATED AND DEPOPULATED DURING THE 1972 HUTU-TUTSI FIGHTING IN THAT REGION. THEIR PROJECT WILL WORK ON CORN, COTTON, SOYA, AND PERHAPS PEANUT PRODUCTION. ON THE INDUSTRIAL SIDE, THERE IS TALK OF ROMANIAN HELP FOR A CERAMICS FACTORY, WHICH WOULD UTILIZE KAOLIN DEPOSITS WHICH THE ROMANIAN GEOLOGISTS HELPED UNCOVER.

6. ROMANIAN CHARGE D'AFFAIRES GHEORGHE BARBU HAS TOLD US THAT THE BURUNDI SIDE CONSTANTLY URGED THE ROMANIANS TO MAKE COMMITMENTS OF CAPITAL, OF WHICH HIS COUNTRY IS INCAPABLE. THUS, HE CLAIMS,
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THERE CAN BE NO QUESTION OF HEAVY ROMANIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LAUNCHING INVESTMENTS INTO THE PROSPECTIVE NICKEL PROJECT, EVEN IF CURRENT FEASIBILITY STUDIES TURN OUT ENCOURAGINGLY. ON THE OTHER HAND, BARBU THINKS THAT ROMANIA HAS DEVELOPED A GOOD RAPPORT WITH BURUNDI AUTHORITIES (THE SYMPATHETIC EX-AMBASSADOR TO BUCHAREST, GASPARD KARENZO, IS NOW MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND MINES HERE), AND THAT THE NEW REGIME IN BUJUMBURA FEELS CONFORTABLE IN DEALING ON A STATE TO STATE BASIS IN TRADE MATTERS WITH A MEDIUM SIZED PARTNER SUCH AS ROMANIA. BARBU CONSIDERS THE FARM AND FACTORY PROJECTS TO BE SENSIBLE AND ON THE RIGHT SCALE, AND HE FINDS COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES TO BE PROGRESSING WELL.

7. WE WOULD GENERALLY AGREE WITH BARBU'S ASSESSMENT. THE ROMANIANS SEEM TO BE PLAYING NO ONE ELSE'S GAME HERE BUT THEIR OWN. THEY ARE MAINLY INTERESTED IN EXPORT EARNINGS AND GOOD WILL FOR THEIR COUNTRY, RATHER THAN IN SPREADING ANY SOCIALIST DOCTRINE, THOUGH THEY ARE NOT AVERSE TO GIVING THE STANDARD ROMANIAN LINE ON INTER-NATIONAL AFFAIRS WHEN ASKED BY LOCAL MEDIA. WE ALSO SEE NO THREAT IN ALL THIS TO WESTERN LEADERSHIP OF NICKEL DEVELOPMENT IN BURUNDI,

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IF AND WHEN THE PROSPECTS FOR SUCH HUGE INVESTMENT BECOME ATTRACTIVE ENOUGH HERE. THE AMERICAN POMOTER FOR NICKEL, MAURICE TEMPELSMAN, HAS ALWAYS TRIED TO INCLUDE THE ROMANIANS IN THE WOULD-BE CONSORTIUM, AND THE NEW SOMIBUROM ARRANGEMENTS DOES LITTLE MORE THAN GIVE THE ROMANIANS A BIT OF EXTRA LEVERAGE, AT LEAST WITH THE BURUNDIANS. THE ROMANIANS HERE SEEM TO BE FULL REALISTS IN UNDERSTANDING THAT WITH THEIR CAPITAL SHORTAGE AND LACK OF NICKEL EXPERTISE, THEY COULD NOT RPT NOT HOPE TO HORN THEIR WAY INTO ANY DOMINANT ROLE IN NICKEL DEVELOPMENT. THOUGH THEY ARE NOT RPT NOT TALKING ABOUT IT, THEY MAY BE MORE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT URANIUM PROSPECTING HERE. THEIR EXPERTS HAVE ALREADY BEEN TO URANIUM EXPLORATION SITES IN BURUNDI, AND THEIR EXPERIENCE IN ROMANIA WITH THIS MINERAL MIGHT GIVE THEM SOME ADVANTAGES IF THE DEPOSITS HERE EVER TURN OUT TO BE COMMERCIALLY EXPLOITABLE.
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